

Interdisciplinary Studies in Musicology 9, 2011

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Sketch for a portrait of Kalkbrenner and Chopin

ABSTRACT: In this article, the author sketches a portrait of Kalkbrenner and Chopin against the background of musical practice during the 1830s. On the basis of sources, including Chopin's correspondence and the opinions of his contemporaries and of Chopin scholars, an attempt is made to distinguish characteristic features of the two composers in their mutual relations. Their contacts are outlined, as well as their artistic activities, with particular emphasis on Chopin's first concert in Paris and the role of pianistic virtuosity linked with the *style brillant*. Attention is drawn to the properties of the Pleyel piano which Kalkbrenner and Chopin both preferred and to the differing playing aesthetics and artistic images of the two composer-virtuosos. Chosen for the purposes of stylistic comparison are their methods of piano playing, with the accent on the schematic nature of Kalkbrenner's "finger technique", whilst most crucial for Chopin was to bring out the beautiful quality of the sound. In the closing remarks, it is stated that the two musicians, in their pianistic, compositional and pedagogic activities, represented the distinct antithesis of one another and two different schools. Prominent in the portrait of Kalkbrenner are distinct connections with the convention of the *style brillant*, whilst the portrait of Chopin, who broke through those conventions, is marked by features more profound and individualised.

KEYWORDS: Friedrich Kalkbrenner, Fryderyk Chopin, piano, virtuosity, *style brillant*, variations, piano concerto, piano playing method

Friedrich Kalkbrenner is named more than once in the Chopin literature, primarily on account of the two composer-virtuosos' contacts in Paris. In a sketch for a portrait of these two creative artists, certain features and differences emerge to which it is worth drawing attention, referring to sources, utterances, opinions and musical examples.

Chopin travelled to Paris, where he would soon come to prominence as a "poet" of the piano, with his first pianistic and compositional successes behind him, carried off in Vienna and Warsaw, as is attested by the composer's letters and also reviews of his concerts.¹ In a letter from Vienna to his family

¹ See review by Joseph L. Blahetka of a performance by Chopin in Vienna and Maurycy Mochnacki's reviews in the *Kurier Polski* of both his Warsaw concerts. *Korespondencja*

(8 August 1829), he writes: "Plachetka [Joseph L. Blachetka] says I'll cause a furore, as I'm a first-rate virtuoso, that I should be ranked with Moscheles, Herz and Kalkbrenner"². This brief mention shows that Kalkbrenner was among the most highly esteemed virtuosos of those times – an opinion shared by the young Chopin. This is also testified by an earlier (1825) brief passage in a letter to Jan Białobłocki³, in which Chopin, writing about the "disorder" of the notes on the piano, names Kalkbrenner alongside Johann Nepomuk Hummel, Ferdinand Ries and Ignace Joseph Pleyel as leading lights in the virtuoso piano literature of the day, also familiar in Warsaw. According to the most recent source findings, Chopin arrived in Paris on 5 October 1831.⁴ A letter of recommendation from Johann Malfatti to Ferdinando Paer⁵ was a suitable endorsement for him to strike up contacts with members of the Parisian musical elite, which with time would be considerably extended. In a letter to Tytus Woyciechowski (Paris, 12 December 1831), Chopin wrote:

Through Paer, [...] I've met Rossini, Cherubini etc., [...] Through him I've also met Kalkbrenner. You won't believe how curious I was about Herz, Liszt, Hiller etc., well they are all nothing compared to Kalkbrenner. [...]. If Paganini is perfection, then Kalkbrenner is his equal, but of a completely different sort.⁶

Only in this letter did Chopin give a more extensive account of his meeting with Kalkbrenner and express an opinion about him, extremely flattering at the time⁷, but soon toned down after he rejected – as we know – an offer to study piano under his guidance. However, this initial tone of youthful enthusiasm, mixed with respect, comes as no surprise, since without the substantial support of influential artists, Chopin would have found it difficult, within such a short time, to fascinate Paris with his playing and his compositions, to take part in its concert life, and also to commence his own teaching work. He

Fryderyka Chopina [Fryderyk Chopin's correspondence], 1816–1831, ed. Zofia Helman, Zbigniew Skowron and Hanna Wróblewska-Straus, i (Warszawa, 2009), 635–638, 649, 655–657.

² Ibid., 270. Cf. other letters from Chopin to his family (August 1829), in which he discusses his performances and the artistic contacts he has made in Vienna at greater length. Ibid., 274–275, 279, 282.

³ Letter to Jan Białobłocki [Warszawa, 29] September [1825]. Ibid., 125.

⁴ Zofia Helman and Hanna Wróblewska-Straus, 'The Date of Chopin's Arrival in Paris', *Musicology Today* (2007), 95–103.

⁵ From a letter sent by Chopin from Vienna (28 May 1831) to his family, we learn that Franz Sales Kandler also furnished him with a letter of recommendation for Paer. *Korespondencja*, i, 496.

⁶ *Korespondencja Fryderyka Chopina* [Fryderyk Chopin's correspondence], ed. Bronisław Edward Sydow, i (Warszawa, 1955), 199.

⁷ For example, in a letter to Norbert Alfons Kumelski (Paris, 18 November 1831), Chopin writes that Kalkbrenner is "the foremost pianist in Europe". Ibid., i, 187.

was well aware of this, as is confirmed by words from the above-quoted letter to Tytus Woyciechowski, coloured with a humorous tone:

Paris is everything you could want – you can have fun, be bored, laugh, cry, do everything you like and no one will look at you, [...]. I don't know if there are most pianists anywhere other than in Paris – I don't know if there are more asses and more virtuosos anywhere else.⁸

From Chopin's correspondence, we learn that Kalkbrenner was very kind and amicable towards him (they remained friends for years)⁹ and offered to teach him piano for three years. Chopin addressed this question in that letter to Tytus Woyciechowski, which is now permeated with a critical tone: "I told him [Kalkbrenner] [...] that I don't want to imitate him and 3 years is too much"¹⁰. He words this more forcibly in a letter to Józef Elsner of 14 December 1831: "Three years is a lot! [...]. I have enough of an idea that I won't be a copy of Kalkbrenner"¹¹. This is undoubtedly a reply to a letter from Elsner, who, convinced of his pupil's outstanding talent (his report from the Main School of Music gave the following appraisal of Chopin: "special ability, musical genius"), could only have reacted with disapproval to the idea of his studying with Kalkbrenner. Incidentally, it is worth mentioning that Elsner was the first to come out in defence of "faithfulness to Chopin's text", criticising Kalkbrenner's suggestion that Chopin make cuts to the first movement of his *E minor Concerto*.¹² The question of further studies recurs several times in Chopin's correspondence with his family, with perhaps the most apt comment coming from Ludwika Chopin, who, relating a conversation with Elsner, wrote to her brother: "You, today, sensing what is good and what is better, should beat your own path; your genius will guide you"¹³.

A concerned Mikolaj Chopin adopted a similar tone on learning that his son might study for three years under Kalkbrenner, whom he even suspected

⁸ Ibid., i, 199.

⁹ One arrives at this conclusion on the basis of four extant short letters sent to Chopin (from 1834, 1842 and 1845) concerning visits and meetings in the company of family and friends, and also advice given to Kalkbrenner's son (Arthur) in connection with his performance of Chopin's *Sonata in B minor*. See *Korespondencja*, Sydow, i, 247, ii, 75, 125, 152. Apart from several of Chopin's letters from the beginning of his time in Paris, further mentions of Kalkbrenner are laconic. One such example comes in a letter to Wojciech Grzymała, in which Chopin writes that "Kalkbrenner has died". He did indeed die on 10 June 1849 in a cholera epidemic. Ibid., ii, 299.

¹⁰ *Korespondencja*, Sydow, i, 200.

¹¹ Ibid., i, 205.

¹² Elsner's opinion on this subject was conveyed to Chopin by his sister, Ludwika. Ibid., i, 193. See Mieczysław Tomaszewski, preface, in *Kompozytorzy polscy o Fryderyku Chopinie* [Polish composers on Chopin], ed. Mieczysław Tomaszewski (Kraków, 1964), 35.

¹³ *Korespondencja*, Sydow, i, 193.

of “false” intentions and “envy”, aroused by a sense of rivalry (similar sentiments can be discerned in Elsner’s letter).¹⁴ It is possible that Kalkbrenner’s motivation was different to that which is indicated in Chopin’s correspondence. Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger quotes an official announcement from the *Revue Musicale* of 12 November 1831, informing readers that Kalkbrenner, in connection with a three-year course being organised to promote his piano-playing school, was to take on “four young ladies and four young men”, but with the proviso that he would choose those with “the greatest chance of achieving success”¹⁵. The evident fact that these letters and the announcement date from around the same time suggests that Kalkbrenner’s proposition was above all beneficial for him in financial terms, as well, given that the price of the course was 1500 francs. As an experienced teacher, he espied a “chance of success” both for himself and in Chopin, whom he had only just met. He talked about Chopin with esteem, but, probably because he was an adherent of a school that derived from Muzio Clementi and wished to spread his own piano-playing method (which he published in 1831), he advised Chopin that he could not “build [...] a new school without knowing the old one”¹⁶; that is, the “grand school of piano”, of which Kalkbrenner considered himself a representative. Although they did not ultimately become teacher and pupil, they did become better acquainted, as was expressed, among other things, in their artistic work.

The ten-year period from 1825 to 1835 was the peak period in Kalkbrenner’s career, which developed in Paris following a period in England. Kalkbrenner, who collaborated with one of the leading European piano makers, Pleyel, helped to organise the first Paris concert in which Chopin took part – on 25 February 1832, at the Salle Pleyel.¹⁷ That concert, which attracted a number of musical celebrities, was designed chiefly to promote Pleyel’s instruments and a virtuosic work by Kalkbrenner. His *Grande Polonaise, précédée d’une Introduction et d’une Marche* for six pianos (the original version, Op. 92 is for piano accompanied by two violins, viola, cello and double bass) was performed by Kalkbrenner and Chopin (solo parts) with Ferdinand Hiller, Camille-Marie Stamaty, George Alexander Osborne and Wojciech Sołwiński (piano parts instead of ensemble accompaniment). The augmented

¹⁴ Ibid., i, 188–189, 239–240.

¹⁵ Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger, ‘Koncerty Chopina w Paryżu w latach 1832–1838’ [Chopin’s concert in Paris in 1832–1838], *Rocznik Chopinowski* 17 (1987), 149.

¹⁶ *Korespondencja*, Sydow, i, 200.

¹⁷ The contentious issue of the dating of this concert, which was postponed from its original date, as Chopin mentions in his letters, is cleared up by Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger: ‘Pierwszy koncert Chopina w Paryżu: 25 lutego 1832. Nieznane dokumenty’ [Chopin’s first concert in Paris: 25 February 1832. Unknown documents], *Ruch Muzyczny* 19 (2008), 34–38.

sound of the piano as played by six pianists – that “crazy idea”, as Chopin defined it¹⁸ – was clearly tailored to the virtuosic aims upheld by Kalkbrenner and other composer-virtuosi from the sphere of the *style brillant*. In Eigeldinger’s opinion¹⁹, Stamaty’s first concert at the Salle Pleyel, on 15 March 1835, with the participation of Kalkbrenner, Herz, Hiller, Osborne and probably Chopin, referred to that performance of the *Grande Polonaise* for six pianos.

Products of this type were well received by audiences, which, craving new sensations, expected dazzling virtuosic repertoire. *Hexameron*, for example, was a sort of pianistic concert tournament (1837) and collective composition rolled into one – a set of variations on the theme of the march from Vincenzo Bellini’s opera *I puritani* composed by Ferenc Liszt, Sigismund Thalberg, Johann Peter Pixis, Henri Herz, Carl Czerny and Chopin.²⁰ Popular at that time were works for four hands (and more, such as a polonaise by Kalkbrenner for twelve hands), including various transcriptions, particularly on operatic themes, intended for the concert platform, but also functioning in the salon. For instance, in 1838, Franz Stoepel presented a programme featuring twenty ladies playing “several *grand morceaux* for four hands on ten pianos all at once”²¹. One extreme, even astonishing, example of the multi-piano fashion that arose with the expansion of the piano in musical practice during the first half of the nineteenth century was Henri Herz’s *Grande Marche Triomphale* for forty pianos (alas, for the American premiere of this work, only eight instruments were secured).²² But to get back to Chopin’s first Paris concert (in which he played, among other things, his *E minor Concerto*, Op. 11), it was of particular significance, since thanks to that event, which came about with the significant help of Kalkbrenner, Chopin achieved great success, noted by his peers. The unique style of Chopin’s playing and compositions aroused the admiration of the artistic auditorium: “The foremost salons of the capital opened before Chopin”.²³ Well-known publishers, like Maurice Schlesinger, “hastened with offers to publish his works” and Pleyel recommended him his instruments.

¹⁸ *Korespondencja*, Sydow, i, 201.

¹⁹ Eigeldinger, ‘Koncerty Chopina w Paryżu’, 164. Cf. Sophie Ruhlmann, ‘Chopin-Franchomme’, in *Chopin w kręgu przyjaciół* [Chopin in his circle of friends], ed. Irena Poniatowska, ii (Warszawa, 1996), 60.

²⁰ See Danuta Jasińska, ‘Hexameron – uwagi o formie wirtuozowskiej i *Wariacji E-dur Chopina*’ [Hexameron – remarks on virtuosic form and Chopin’s *Variation in E major*], in *Muzyka w kontekście kultury* [Music in the context of culture], ed. Małgorzata Janicka-Słysz, Teresa Malecka and Krzysztof Szewajgier (Kraków, 2001), 67–77.

²¹ Quoted in William G. Atwood, *The Parisian Worlds of Frédéric Chopin* (New Haven, 1999), 173.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Eigeldinger, ‘Koncerty Chopina w Paryżu’, 151.

Chopin, like Kalkbrenner, had a high regard for Pleyel's pianos, which favoured a light touch, nuanced playing and a "singing" sound. Chopin's preference for a Pleyel was to some extent the result of "his being accustomed to the lightness of Viennese and early English actions"²⁴, with which Chopin had been familiar since his performances in Warsaw. Their popularity in the Kingdom of Poland was not just due to the great demand for instruments, but was also linked to performance practice and the presence of "brilliant"-style repertoire. In his *Ausführliche theoretisch-praktische Anweisung zum Piano-Forte Spiel* (1828), Hummel systematised the means of piano technique and gave a graded exposition of the ways of using two basic elements: figuration, serving to make the fingers more agile, and ornamentation, fulfilling a decorative role. In the process, he praised the Viennese action and also recommended the English action. The former ensured a lightness to running figures and brought a clean, "pearly" sound; the latter, with a stronger, fuller sound, favoured "singing" at on the instrument. For example, Jean-Baptiste Cramer, Jan Ladislav Dussek and John Field, who drew greater attention to the fluent *legato* playing made possible by the English instruments of those times, favoured the latter.

For composer-virtuosos, the choice of piano, which in the 1830s was still being improved, was of practical and aesthetic importance. Pleyel pianos, which Kalkbrenner used (he also, as we will remember, collaborated with that firm), described by Chopin as *non plus ultra*, displayed different qualities to instruments by Erard. Modifying the instrument's action and overcoming the "stiffness" of the keyboard, Pleyel obtained a sound that could suit both Kalkbrenner, who gave particular prominence to finger technique, and also Chopin, with his marked sensitivity to the beauty and nuances of the sound. According to a description by Claude Montal, the Pleyel piano had a sound that was "pure, clear, even and intense"; in *piano* playing, the hammers brought out a "soft and velvety tone, gaining in brightness and volume with stronger pressure on the keyboard"²⁵. The difference in pianistic technique between Liszt, for example, whose playing was full of verve and showy pianistic gestures, and the refined playing of Chopin are well known and described in the subject literature.²⁶ If we relate this to the choice of instrument, its tonal ca-

²⁴ Benjamin Vogel, 'Fortepiany epoki Chopina a współczesna praktyka wykonawcza' [The pianos of Chopin's era and contemporary performance practice], *Rocznik Chopinowski* 17 (1987), 132.

²⁵ Quoted in Eigeldinger, *Chopin: pianist and teacher as seen by his pupils*, tr. Naomi Shohet with Krycia Osostowicz and Roy Howat, ed. Roy Howat (Cambridge, 1986), 91 n.7 [Fr. orig. *Chopin vu par ses élèves*, 3rd edn (Boudry-Neuchâtel, 1988)].

²⁶ Irena Poniatowska, 'Chopin-Liszt. Uwagi o środkach wirtuozowskich i wzajemnych relacjach obu artystów' [Chopin and Liszt. Remarks on the virtuosic means employed by both and on their mutual relations], in *Historia i interpretacja muzyki. Z badań nad*

pacities and the aural impressions of audiences of the day, we better understand a note that was published in *Le Pianiste* in 1834:

Give Liszt, Herz [...] an *Erard*; but to Kalkbrenner, Chopin and Hiller give a *Pleyel*; a *Pleyel* is needed to sing a Field romance, to caress a Chopin *mazourk* [*sic!*], to sigh a Kessler nocturne; but for the big concert an *Erard* is necessary.²⁷

From various accounts, one can distinguish such attributes of Chopin's playing as a sensitivity to the beauty of the sound, lightness, delicacy, ease and purity, a singing and poetical tone, intimacy, a simplicity and naturalness of musical utterance and a loftiness, originality and perfection of style. Opinions on Kalkbrenner, meanwhile, take on a different hue. Kalkbrenner was esteemed first and foremost for his excellent technique, exemplified in his compositions in the use of current pianistic figures, in accordance with the virtuosic manner of the *style brillant*, and expressed also in his etudes, exercises and guidelines for a piano-playing method. Chopin was perceived by contemporaries on a completely different plane. In a letter from 1836, Charles Hallé described him as an "angel", and his music as "pure, and clear, and spiritual"; Kalkbrenner, in comparison, was "a child"²⁸. For Heinrich Heine, Chopin, being "more a composer than a virtuoso", was a "great poet of music", an "artist of genius"²⁹. Heine also held Liszt in high regard, but was far from complimentary about many other pianists of the day, defining them, for example (perhaps over-exaggeratedly), as "mummies". Among their number, he also included the "pompous and egotistical" Kalkbrenner, with his "embalmed smile" and "candied sugar-cake exterior"³⁰. Georges Mathias also remembered Kalkbrenner for his "eternal banal smile" and "sympathetic conceit"; Wilhelm von Lenz, in turn, mentioned his "artificial" and "puffed-up" distinction.³¹ Various mentions referred to the technical pedantry of Kalkbrenner's playing, which, although containing virtuosic gestures, was expressionless and lacking depth. There was also no lack of caustic utterances, for example that he was "going to bore the cherubims on high" when he died.³² But there were also flattering opinions. For instance, according to an account published in *Le Pianiste*, Kalkbrenner's playing was distinguished by its precision and

muzykę od XVII do XIX wieku [The history and interpretation of music. Of research into music from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century] (Kraków, 1993), 117–144. Cf. Poniatowska, *W kręgu recepcji i rezonansu muzyki. Szkice Chopinowskie* [From the reception and resonance of music. Sketches on Chopin] (Warszawa, 2008).

²⁷ Quoted in Eigeldinger, *Chopin: pianist and teacher*, 92 n.9.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 271.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 285.

³⁰ Quoted in Atwood, *The Parisian Worlds*, 177.

³¹ Quoted in Adam Czartkowski and Zofia Jeżewska, *Fryderyk Chopin* (Warszawa, 1970), 392, 405.

³² Atwood, *The Parisian Worlds*, 131.

clarity of tone, as well as its “elegance and finesse of striking”, with a “dose of coquetry”³³. Whilst the Romantics saw Chopin as a “poet” of the piano, Kalkbrenner, adhering to the convention of the virtuosic “brilliant” style (which by the 1840s was going out of fashion in the concert hall, although it remained a vital element in “salon music”), earned the name of “minstrel”³⁴.

From Mathias’s recollections, another trait for a portrait of Chopin and Kalkbrenner emerges. As he writes in his letter-preface to a work by Isidore Philipp:

[...] they were poles apart. One feature they shared was that they both behaved like true gentlemen. [...] there was one further similarity between them: they both dressed [...] according to the current fashion, but Chopin’s buttons were black and Kalkbrenner invariably wore gold buttons.³⁵

The refined elegance and distinguished image that Chopin created were essential attributes for him to enter elite Parisian society whilst remaining an “aristocrat of spirit”, as Ryszard Przybylski excellently interpreted the phenomenon within the context of the Romantic aesthetic and Chopin’s thoughts.³⁶ Kalkbrenner also moved within those circles, taking care over his appearance and artistic image. However, it seems that he could not compare in this respect with Chopin, whose legend was born within a select group of connoisseurs, artists and friends. Chopin’s salon, with his delightful playing and music, was perceived in terms of an almost mythical temple of art. Kalkbrenner’s salon, meanwhile, although hosting distinguished individuals from the aristocracy and recognised artists, as well as providing musical repertoire (chiefly virtuosic projects), was one of many in Paris and did not gain such a great reputation in posterity as that of Chopin. This is evidenced, for example, in writings from that period (letters, accounts, journals, literary sources, and so on) that deal largely with Chopin.

Several more observations arise in relation to Kalkbrenner’s compositional work and to his piano-playing method, which occupies an important place in terms of the pianistic and didactic achievements of the first half of the nineteenth century and the piano schools published during that period, as indeed

³³ Quoted in Poniatowska, ‘Kalkbrenner Frédéric’, in Elżbieta Dziębowska (ed.), *Encyklopedia Muzyczna PWM*, v (Kraków, 1997), 15.

³⁴ Besides Chopin and Kalkbrenner, in the nineteenth-century literary depiction of well-known virtuosos, Thalberg was “king”, Liszt a “prophet”, Herz a “lawyer”, Mme Pleyel “Sibyl”, and Döhler simply a “pianist”. Mme Delphine de Girardin, *Lettres parisiennes* (Paris, 1857), quoted in Eigeldinger, ‘Hexameron ou Chopin dans une “Galerie de Pianistes”’, in *Chopin and His Work in the Context of Culture*, ed. Irena Poniatowska, i (Kraków, 2003), 372.

³⁵ Czartkowski and Jeżewska, *Chopin*, 391.

³⁶ Ryszard Przybylski, *Cień jaskółki. Esej o myślach Chopina* [A swallow’s shadow. An essay on Chopin’s thoughts] (Kraków, 1995), 93–169.

does the method of Chopin, which, although unfinished and preserved only in sketches, defines the individual profile of Chopin's teaching and musical thinking. Kalkbrenner's compositional output is quite abundant, encompassing forms that are typical of those times. On one hand, those forms derive from the Classical tradition; on the other, they are linked to the *style brillant*³⁷, in which the virtuosic element, with pianistic figures of a technical (virtuosic) and ornamental (decorative) orientation, determined the superficial approach to form and shallow expression. Kalkbrenner's oeuvre contains four piano concertos, works for piano and orchestra, chamber works, thirteen piano sonatas, numerous rondos, variation sets and fantasias, as well as nocturnes, waltzes, occasional pieces and didactic works, such as the *24 Préludes dans tous les tons*, Op. 88 and etudes. In his variations and fantasias, he turned to well-known, popular themes, particularly from opera (e.g. *Variations brillantes*, Op. 71 on a theme from Weber's *Der Freischütz*, *Fantaisie et variations*, Op. 123 on a theme from Bellini's *La straniera* and *Fantaisie et variations brillantes*, Op. 156 on a theme from Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore*), which was a practice widely used by composer-virtuosos in the "brilliant" style.

Kalkbrenner, whilst drawing on the achievements of Cramer, Hummel and Field, and then of virtuosos of the younger generation (Chopin, Thalberg, Liszt), "did not do so in a creative manner", as Irena Poniatowska states. "His compositions are lacking original traits"³⁸. Nevertheless, he did develop some pianistic means, such as passage and octave technique (especially in the left hand) and ornamental figures. As we know, Chopin dedicated to Kalkbrenner his *E minor Concerto*, as specified in Schlesinger's original Paris edition and in the Leipzig edition by Kistner (June 1833). A few months earlier, as we learn from a mention made by Chopin in a letter to Dominik Dziewanowski (January 1833), Kalkbrenner composed *Variations brillantes*, Op. 120 on the theme of a Chopin mazurka (in B flat major, Op. 7 No. 1). This work, of a virtuosic character, expresses features typical of the *style brillant*. In the opinion of Mieczysław Tomaszewski, "the theme here is preceded [...] by a mighty, highly virtuosic introduction, to which the composer imparted [...] a polonaise rhythm. In the five supremely showy variations, one is hard pressed to find any profound connection with the music of the theme"³⁹.

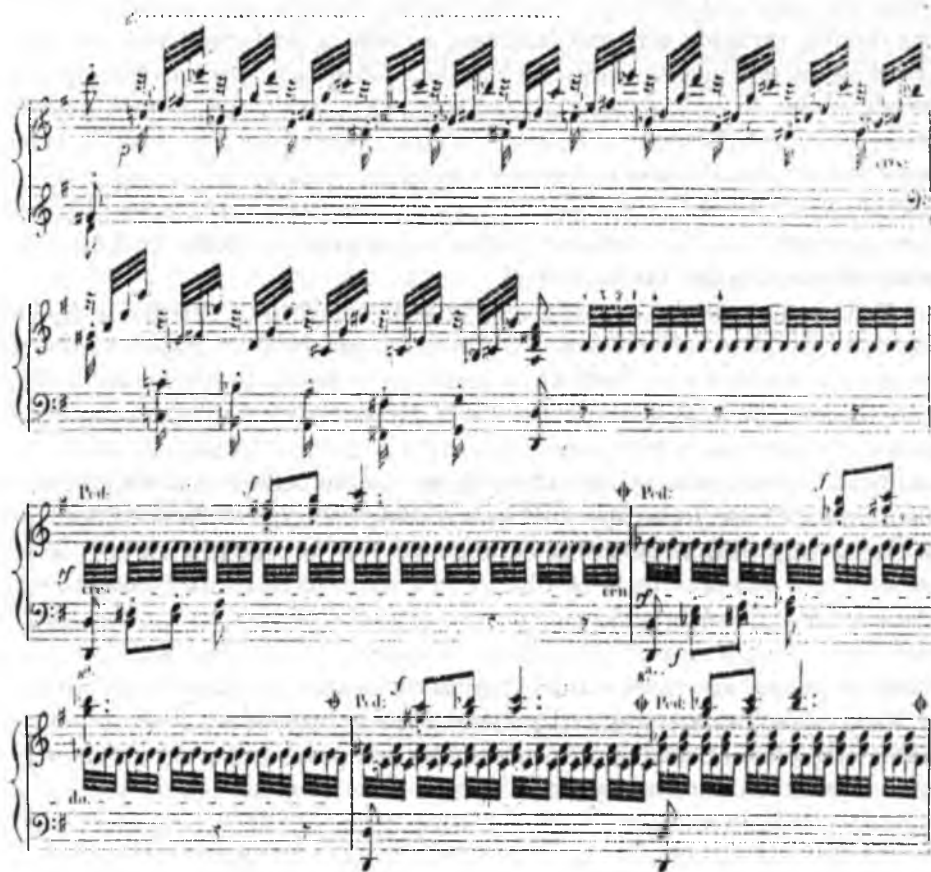
One typical example of *style brillant* form is Kalkbrenner's *Grande fantaisie et variations brillantes pour piano sur un chœur de la "Norma" de*

³⁷ For a broader discussion of forms in the *style brillant*, see Danuta Jasińska, *Styl brilliant a muzyka Chopina* [The *style brillant* and the music of Chopin] (Poznań, 1995), 39–93.

³⁸ Poniatowska, 'Kalkbrenner Frédéric', 15.

³⁹ Mieczysław Tomaszewski, *Muzyka Chopina na nowo odczytana. Studia i interpretacje* [Chopin's music re-read. Studies and interpretations] (Kraków, 1996), 128; Mieczysław Tomaszewski, *Chopin. Człowiek, dzieło, rezonans* [Chopin. The man, his work and its resonance] (Poznań, 1998), 749.

Bellini, Op. 140 (Paris: Prilipp [c.1843]). The devices of virtuoso flair used by the composer are current pianistic formulas of the period. One characteristic feature is the use of a uniform intervallic pattern within a given figuration, cast around various registers of the instrument. Already in the introduction, there is a glut of effects of digital dexterity, in connection with the use of the four main technical formulas, namely octaves, passages, scales and repeats, which recur with minor alterations over the course of successive variations. (Example 1)



Example 1. Kalkbrenner, *Grande fantaisie et variations brillantes*,
Op. 140, fragment of introduction

The presentation of the theme is followed by three variations and a *Vivace* finale that merges previous material with technical devices. Their clear excess and virtuosic character is in keeping with the formal scheme and does not disturb its tonal stability (G major). The chromaticism, which appears frag-

mentarily (in the first two variations) fills only the degrees of the diatonic scale in the figurations or is connected with a sequence of chords and intervals of a third. (Example 2)



Example 2. Kalkbrenner, *Grande fantaisie et variations brillantes*,
Op. 140, fragment of Variation I

Scale passages, leaps of an octave and a tenth, and playing in double thirds that shape the flow of the first variation are followed by the second variation, in which only the type of means is contrasted (scales and passages juxtaposed with chordal technique) and the alternation of the hands is employed. This procedure is repeated in the third variation, alongside strongly accentuated repetition. (Example 3)



Example 3. Kalkbrenner, *Grande fantaisie et variations brillantes*,
Op. 140, fragment of Variation III

This kind of virtuosic and stereotypical approach to variations is different to Chopin's idea of a variation set. Chopin's creative approach to virtuosity means that the means of pianistic technique do not obscure the logic of the form and help to produce a texture with balanced, proportional features. Figurational passages and ornamental variants are linked to the development of the thematic idea, moulding the form and lending it more profound sense and expression. In Chopin's concertos, as well, purely virtuosic elements do not dominate the musical drama of the composition, and so the danger of the narrative disintegrating into a series of unrelated particles, as was generally encountered in the "brilliant"-style sonata allegro, is avoided. Individual features are also in evidence in the themes and in Chopin's cantilena, to which he brings a dose of lyricism, the unique, original tone of which differs from the utterances of Hummel or Field and takes on features that cannot be compared

to the utterances of Herz or Kalkbrenner. Traditional Chopin scholarship has drawn attention to the links between Chopin's *E minor Concerto* and concertos by Hummel and Field, as well as the *Concerto in D minor*, Op. 61 by Kalkbrenner, although Jim Samson stresses here, above all, the Mozartian affinities, noting "a 'Classical' balance of contrasting rhythmic and harmonic elements underlying the unbroken flow of the music"⁴⁰.

The piano concerto was one form on which the *style brillant* made its mark. The changes concerned primarily the conception of the sonata allegro. Usually, the solo part was intoned by virtuosic formulas (introduction and cadence). This was followed by two thematic sections alternating with figuration. The thematic dualism was blurred (cantilena in both themes), and expansive episodes with figural formulas discharged a mostly virtuosic function. The prominent virtuosic element also permeated the development, taking the place of thematic working as traditionally understood. This is just how Kalkbrenner proceeds, for example, in his *Concerto in A minor*, Op. 107 (Leipzig: Kistner [c.1832]), where the surfeit of technical means is such that it is even hard to distinguish the parts of the *Allegro*. The accumulation of virtuosic devices in the exposition of the piano part includes a quasi-improvisational cadence before the entrance of the principal theme, which subsequently passes through various pianistic figures (chiefly octave technique, scale progressions, passages, double notes, chordal figuration), repeated in a uniform pattern and gradating performance skills. (Example 4)



Example 4. Kalkbrenner, *Concerto in A minor*,
Op. 107, fragment of cadence

⁴⁰ Jim Samson, *The Music of Chopin* (London, 1985), 52.

In the thematic *Legato e cantabile* section, a lyrical element comes to the fore, with a conventional use of irregular ornamental groupings in a diatonic-chromatic section, shortly giving way to virtuosic figuration, incorporated into the development and intensifying in the coda. (Examples 5 and 6)

The musical score is a fragment of the development section of Kalkbrenner's Concerto in A minor, Op. 107. It is written for piano and consists of four systems of music. Each system has a treble and bass staff. The music is characterized by rapid, complex figuration, including triplets and sixteenth notes. Dynamic markings include *ff* (fortissimo), *f* (forte), and *sf* (sforzando). Tempo markings include *lento* and *rit.* (ritardando). The score is divided into four systems, each with a treble and bass staff. The key signature is one flat (A minor). The tempo is marked *lento* at the beginning of the first system. The score ends with a double bar line and the number 393-1013.

Example 5. Kalkbrenner, *Concerto in A minor*,
Op. 107, fragment of development



Example 6. Kalkbrenner, *Concerto in A minor*,
Op. 107, fragment of coda

Differences between Kalkbrenner and Chopin are also discernible in their etudes. The etude belonged primarily to the canon of pedagogic literature at that time, but it also developed as a concert piece. Both types clearly illustrate the aims and activities of performers representing the *style brillant*. For example, in Kalkbrenner's *Traité d'harmonie du pianiste*, one finds etudes serving the teaching of improvisation on the piano. A didactic aim is contained in the sets of *Études*, Op. 20 and *Préludes*, Op. 88, ordered according to the circle of fifths. Other cycles (such as Opp. 143 and 161) also specified the area of pianism addressed. The etude, when cast as a set of technical devices, became a compilation of figures given priority over form. In this context, the phenomenon of the Chopin etude is not linked to the *style brillant* as such. In the process of integrating textural means with the flow of a composition, Chopin employed individual stylistic solutions. In both his sets of etudes, he transcends the technical-virtuosic rhetoric of the *style brillant*, enriches the pianistic substance and lends the etude an artistic form. He displays a dynamic approach to the impulses deriving from musical practice, developing and synthesising.

Differences between the two composers are also noted in their piano-playing method. In his *Méthode pour apprendre le piano-forte à l'aide du guide-mains* (1831), Kalkbrenner gives many important hints regarding fingering, pedal, phrasing, producing the sound and executing embellishments, illustrating the principles of piano playing, as Irena Poniatowska has discussed in detail.⁴¹ She emphasises that Kalkbrenner observed the rules of “finger playing”, confining the movement of the hands to just the wrist, and stressed the equality and independence of the fingers. In order to achieve this, he systematically employed regular exercises to keep his hands in shape and used both a mute keyboard and a “guide-mains”⁴². Like other composer-virtuosos, he recommended “singing” on the instrument and imitating famous singers to that effect.⁴³ Hints of this kind were linked to the conception of expression that was widespread at that time (familiar from earlier studies and from the performance tradition), such as similar remarks by Hummel and Thalberg. In the source analyses of Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger⁴⁴, we find critical comments on Kalkbrenner’s method, in particular the mechanical nature of his exercises. Karol Mikuli mentioned that Kalkbrenner advised the pianist to read something while doing such exercises. This was confirmed by Thomas Tellefsen, in his treatise modelled on Chopin’s method. Tellefsen added that Kalkbrenner’s “uniformalised” teaching method and the practice of mechanical exercises were uncondusive to the teaching of playing, and to music even more so.⁴⁵ According to Chopin’s experience in playing and teaching, transmitted fragmentarily in his unfinished *Esquisses pour une méthode de piano*, the playing action cannot issue solely from the wrist and obscure the beauty of the sound. For Chopin, the purpose of a well-formed hand action, based on the natural position of the hands, facilitating unconstrained movements, was to obtain and shade the most beautiful quality of sound possible. The move-

⁴¹ Poniatowska, *Muzyka fortepianowa i pianistyka w wieku XIX. Aspekty artystyczne i społeczne* [Piano music and pianism in the nineteenth century. Artistic and social aspects] (Warszawa, 1991), 47–133; Irena Poniatowska, ‘Do problemu metody gry fortepianowej w okresie romantyzmu’ [On the question of piano-playing methodology during the Romantic era], in *Chopin w kręgu przyjaciół* [Chopin in his circle of friends], ed. Poniatowska, iii (Warszawa, 1997), 166–188; Poniatowska, *W kręgu recepcji*, 141–166.

⁴² Intrigued by the “chiroplaste”, invented by Johann Bernhard Logier, Kalkbrenner made a similar device, the “guide-mains”, consisting of a strip of wood that automatically regulated the position of the hands, fingers and forearms while playing exercises in piano technique. Herz also modelled on Logier’s device his “dactylion” – a set of rings on the fingers suspended on springs.

⁴³ He named such singers as Girolamo Crescentini, Pierre Jean Garat, Giuditta Pasta and Maria Malibran. Poniatowska, *Muzyka fortepianowa*, 99.

⁴⁴ Eigeldinger, *Chopin: pianist and teacher*. See also *Frédéric Chopin. Esquisses pour une méthode de piano*, ed. Eigeldinger (Paris, 1993).

⁴⁵ *Chopin. Esquisses*, 91.

ments of the wrist were like breaths taken by a singer. In respect to fingering, to which he attached particular importance, he emphasised the individual significance of each of the fingers and a manner of striking that was suited to each. On the pages of his *Esquisses*, he noted: "As each finger is differently formed, it's better not to attempt to destroy the particular charm of each one's touch but on the contrary to develop it"⁴⁶.

His original conception, innovative for those times, differed from the piano-playing method of Kalkbrenner, who expressed his reservations, for example, about Chopin's fingering, in which he discerned many inaccuracies. Chopin, in turn, guided by his own pianistic practice and piano teaching, could not recommend "useless" and "tedious" exercises carried out schematically, if they did not stimulate the musician's sensitivity and imagination. For Chopin, music was "The art of expressing one's thoughts through sounds" and "The manifestation of our feelings through sounds"⁴⁷.

To close, one may say that these two creative artists, in their playing, composing and teaching, constituted, as Antoine Marmontel aptly judged, "marked antitheses, the vivid expression of two absolutely different schools"⁴⁸. It also seems that the portrait of Kalkbrenner sketched here displays conventional features, traced with a Parisian shade of *style brillant*. In the portrait of Chopin, meanwhile, that framework is broken; virtuosity remains in the background, with deeper, individualised expression to the fore.

Translated by John Comber

⁴⁶ Quoted in Eigeldinger, *Chopin: pianist and teacher*, 195. See also *Chopin. Esquisses*, 74.

⁴⁷ Eigeldinger, *Chopin: pianist and teacher*, 195; *Chopin. Esquisses*, 48.

⁴⁸ *Chopin. Esquisses*, 75 n. 53.

